

THE Edgerton ENTERPRISE

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Authors of "Warrior Sisters" visit Edgerton

In May, the Edgerton Bookclub attendees discussed "Warrior Sisters", by Kelly Ryan and Karen Burd. This memoir reveals "one family's raw and honest journey from chaos, pain, and destruction to the redemption and restoration that comes from recovery."

The authors came to Edgerton on June 8-10 for several speaking engagements. On Thursday, June 9, at the Edgerton Public Library the authors of "Warrior Sisters" gave a presentation titled: "Sister Talk: A courageous conversation of love, boundaries and forgiveness." Amazingly, almost 60 people attended the event. The authors also offered books for sale, and autographed books while there.

At the library last Thursday. Author Kelly Ryan said, "Edgerton really knows how to throw a party."

Karen Burd said, "This feels surreal... because the audience knows so much about me. I had forgotten there are such special places like this in the world."

The story of how the event came to be is impressive. "I don't believe in coincidence," said Kelly Ryan.

Dave Hulstein received the book "Warrior Sisters" from friends of his, Darrin and Kelly Kortleever. Dave has been sober for 12 years and the book "Warrior Sisters" resonated with him. "I only read about one book a year, and this was the one." The book had a profound effect on him, so he tried to get in touch with the authors.

Kelly Ryan had gotten a Facebook message from Dave Hulstein, and asked her sister and co-author, Karen Burd, if she had gotten a message from him. She said yes. In his messages to them Hulstein asked, "Do you ever go out and speak [about your book]?"

Kelly Ryan called him while he was out working at the Herm Bos place. It was a strange number, so he almost didn't answer, but he did. Kelly identified herself. Amazingly, she had realized that she had a connection to Edgerton, Minnesota, even though she lives in Colorado. Her husband's office manager is Erin Fey, who grew up in Edgerton. Kelly Kortleever of Edgerton is Erin's sister, as is Amber Randolph, who also lives in Colorado, and just happened to be in Edgerton at the same time as the authors.

A few years ago, Kelly had an idea about writing a book, and her friend suggested she, and her sister Karen, write about their journeys. So she asked Karen, "Do you want to write a book?" She responded with, "Ya, sure."

They had gotten advice to write their stories until there was nothing left to write. While Kelly is familiar with computers, Karen is old school, and wrote her story with a pen and a notebook during COVID. Once she had her story on paper, she used voice to text on her phone to compose emails to Kelly.

"I don't think there's a person that hasn't had a family member affected by drug or alcohol abuse," said Ryan.

Their goal was to make a difference in communities and to provide

hope and inspiration. They spoke about their own journeys, which they had written about in the book.

Kelly was a functioning alcoholic, and was able to maintain her job while becoming sober. "I was a daily drinker, and there was always a reason to drink, and I had a job that allowed it. I knew I had a problem for 9 years. I hid it well," she said.

"I didn't have to go through treatment," said Ryan. She attended a lot of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings before finding a good fit. That was the beginning of her road to recovery.

Karen didn't function as well, and moved to drugs. She even resorted to selling drugs. On more than one occasion she was arrested. After a while getting arrested became normal rather than something uncomfortable.

Because Kelly works in the field of counseling she had connections and knew about different program options around the country. Kelly and her family tried multiple times to get her sister, Karen, help, but Karen wasn't ready.

Kelly had to learn to set some boundaries, which was painful. She wanted Karen to get healthy and sober, and was mad at God. "He better do something soon because... I had her dead and buried."

"I was beyond hope, Karen said. "Every time I failed, hope went away a little more, until I was beyond hope. I didn't care what my family felt. I said I was protecting them from what I was doing. But the truth was I was just a selfish human being, and didn't want anyone telling me what to do or not do anymore."

At 53, Karen hit her bottom and ended up in jail, again, but this time without a way to get out. "When I realized I didn't want to do this anymore, it was my first gift," said Karen.

It was stressful for the rest of the family to learn she was in jail. They were worried that she would be beaten, or worse. After 24 hours, Kelly realized it was okay. "It was the first good night's sleep my mom had had in years, because she [Karen] wasn't on the streets. It ended up being the biggest blessing for her, and our family."

Karen and Kelly work 12 step programs, and both found a spiritual path to freedom from addiction, although both sisters stated that their beliefs aren't identical.

"Acceptance is amazing when you walk in a 12 step room. They told me, 'We'll love you until you learn to love yourself.' We were all there, with the common theme, trying to stay sober one day at a time," Kelly recalled. It will be 17 years, in July, that Kelly has been sober.

Alcoholism and drug addiction leads to isolation and secrets, and self loathing. "I'm recovering from life. I'm recovering from all the things through the years that people have told me and I believed. Then I understood what believing a lie does. Then I realized it was my job to learn what God thinks about me," said Burd. "It took most of my life to work through the messages I had heard most of my life." Karen has been sober for 8 years.

Karen shared, "It's been so incredible to feel that spirit of oneness with other people. The constant comparison is gone. Now I see people and what we have in common, and it has made my life a great joy to live!"

Hulstein said, "This book wasn't reaching enough people. I am so thrilled by what this community is doing by just showing up tonight. I didn't do this. God took this thing and ran with it. I'm standing in amazement. First of all... me reading a book was amazing. I thought I'd walk in to see five people here. I am thankful for all of you being here!"

The authors of "Warrior Sisters," Kelly Ryan and Karen Burd, also spoke in Pipestone at Meinders Community Library on Friday, and at New Life Treatment Center in Woodstock, on Saturday afternoon, at the Horses to Horsepower Fundraising Event. The presentation at the Edgerton Public Library was funded, in part, by grants from American Library Association and National Endowment for the Humanities.



Karen Burd and Kelly Ryan, authors of "Warrior Sisters," with Dave Hulstein, who was instrumental in bringing them to the area.